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THE CHILDREN'S PAPER

YOUTH AND AGE.

(*From the painting by H. Windsor Fry, R.B.A., in the Walker Art Gallery. By permission of the Corporation of Liverpool.*)

"The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the grey head."

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS, LTD., LONDON, EDINBURGH, AND NEW YORK.

The Moat-House Mystery.

A School Tale.

WE'D always considered that the grounds of the Moat House were school property. The place was so jolly big that it had stood empty for years; so the landlord had, awfully decently, allowed us chaps to have free run of the gardens. But—well, then, when the war was over, the house suddenly "took." An old military-looking gentleman appeared, with a frightfully severe face, a pack of native servants, and a boy and a girl; it was a jolly thrilling party, and we felt more than a bit keen to know more of them. "Dacres is the old chap's name; he's not their pater—they're called something else; and they're from abroad." So said Briggs, the bank-manager's son. "Very queer folk: nobody knows anything about them; but the young chap's sure to come to our school, so we'll hear."

But he didn't; that was the queer part about it. He didn't seem to mean to go to school at all. And other things were queer, too: for instance, there only seemed to be one white servant in the house—a very grim-looking old party who never let the girl out of her sight. The boy, too, who might have told us such loads about India, never seemed to care to whistle back, or even to watch our cricket, which he quite easily might have done from over his wall.

Then one morning just after brekker our Head said, "I have an announcement to make to you boarders. It is from Colonel Dacres. He is leaving the Moat to-day for an indefinite period, but he wishes it to be understood that on no account must the grounds be considered within bounds for the school. They are out-of-bounds absolutely; just as much as though the family were at home!"

What did the peppery old chap send such a message for? That's what we wanted to know! I rather thought that the Head wondered too, but he gave the message without any comment. "Fruit season—that's what it is!" said Heriot to the rest of us. "Measly old dog-in-the-manger—and the strawberries will be A1 this year! But we're not native servants to be treated like dogs. We don't steal fruit, and we'll tell him so. We'll sit on the walls and give him a send-off to the station this afternoon that he'll remember. He's bound to take the three o'clock train; it's the only one!"

Well, that was the idea, and we all agreed; but the plan fell flat after all, for Briggs came peddling up like a fury on his old bike, late for school. "Here, I say," he said, "has that next-door chap turned up as a boarder?"

"Not much," we said; "they're going away," and we told him.

"Why, that's queer," said Briggs, and he whistled. "Why, it *is* queer!" he went on, and then he told us. "I say, I woke up early this morning and heard the sound of carriages passing our house. I scooted out of bed, thinking it might be a gipsy caravan or a circus or something, and—there was the Colonel's little lot—the servants and the girl, and——"

"But why on earth did you ask us, then, whether the chap was here as a boarder?" asked Heriot.

"Because," said Briggs—"well, because he was the only one of all the lot who wasn't there!"

Well, that was queer, as you'll all admit, I should think. We stared at each other and wondered what was up, for the small chap *hadn't* come as a boarder, so much was certain; and I, with my own eyes, had seen him walking among the gooseberry bushes with his sister on the evening before. "I watched him from over the wall," I told the others, "and I was thinking how jolly thirsty I was; so I know."

"Well, where is he now?" said Briggs. "I *know* he didn't travel! Have they left him behind?"

Well, that was the beginning of the mystery; for it really was most awfully uncanny. We got Briggs to make inquiries at the station, and the head porter told him that they *hadn't* taken the boy with them. Where *was* he, then?—for the house was quite shut up. We could see the windows from our wall, and the blinds were all drawn down. "And with that quaint message to say that we're to consider the Moat grounds out of bounds!" said Heriot to me.

"And for them to go off so suddenly!" I said.

"And for 'an indefinite time'!" added Heriot. "I say, you don't think, do you, that there's perhaps been some 'foul play,' and that they've left the chap there to starve!"

It was a most frightful thought, but it really seemed as though it might be true. We sat on the garden wall in shifts right through rec. time, and we mounted guard that way upon the place. There wasn't a sign for two days, for we kept it up; but then, on the third afternoon, our patience was rewarded, for very very slowly one of the front blinds was lifted, before our very eyes, and the face of a native servant glared out at us. When he saw us, though, *down* clamped that blind; but—we'd SEEN! We'd something to work on now; we knew that the Moat House was not empty, that dreadful deeds might be going on within. "Hot irons or suffocation!" said Heriot grimly.

"Starvation or—worse," I added.

"Some underhand and heathen tortures," said Butler.

We couldn't think of cricket or anything else; we stood about and wondered what on earth we could do. Tell the Head—never! He would most certainly declare that we had been mistaken. No, the rescue, if there was to be one, must be managed by us chaps ourselves; only, how on earth were we to do it?

It was Briggs who hurried us up. He'd just started off for home again on his bike when, after about ten minutes, he returned. Heriot and I were still strolling round the field, and wondering what we could do for the imprisoned little chap, when Briggs's face, appearing as it did over the gate with a frightful look of terror on its features, almost bowled us over. "I say," he said, "there's no mistake about it. There's a native in the

garden whispering to a most savage-looking man. And—they're digging a deep hole!"

"Coming?" said Heriot to me, and we were off.

I don't think we had any definite

plan of campaign in our heads. I don't see how we could have had, for we went so suddenly; but we went—that was the long and short of it—for we'd made up our minds that we were going to rescue that boy. Over the wall we went, quite forgetting about bounds; in through the bushes we scrambled, crouching all the way till we nearly reached the house; and then—"Hist!" said Heriot to me, and pointed up to a window at the back on the second floor. A boy stood there, the little chap we'd seen so often; he was most awfully pale, and he was dressed up in a dressing-gown, or something. He looked as though he'd been blubbing for hours; yes, we'd jolly well found him!

It was just then that we found that the back door was open; we tried, just to see, and it was! In we scooted, for we meant to get hold of the poor chap and hale him away to our school before the beastly native had stopped digging his holes; up the stairs we fled, and into the room where we'd seen him. It didn't take a jiff—not so long as it takes to tell you. "Cheero!" said Heriot. "We've come to rescue you! Don't blub any more!"

And then, "I say," said the little chap. "Oh, do go away! I've got mumps, did you know? Oh, it's most awfully kind of you to come! But whatever have you come for?"

Well, I don't think there's much use in telling you the end of the story; we'd been a fine pack of stupids, every one of us. The family *had* left the Moat suddenly, but it was because they'd discovered that the drains were wrong. They'd meant to take the small chap with them, of course, but—well, he developed mumps in the night, and they had to leave him behind for a week till he was better. They couldn't all stay because their plans were made, and the girl was too delicate, or something. But the native with the fierce face was really quite a brick, and he had nursed that boy since he'd been the smallest kid, just born. The only reason why he'd clapped down the blinds in that suspicious way was because he was frightened of us at our school, which shows how quaint natives are; but he really, as we came to know, was the very decentest sort of a fellow. And the hole? Well, *that* was the beginning of the digging up of the drains, of course. The man had come to investigate, and the native came out of the house to tell him that he mustn't begin his digging till the boy was well enough to be moved. Well, Heriot and I caught mumps—and we deserved to, so the matron of our school said; but we got the rippingest fruit sent over from the Moat garden, for the little chap told his great-uncle—that was the reason of the different names—and the great-uncle turned out to be far less peppery than he looked. In fact, he sent a note to Heriot and me asking our favourite kinds of fruits, and thanking us for trying to rescue his nephew. He added that as soon as the drains were right they were all coming back, and that he meant to give a picnic to us all: which he did, and a ripping one too; and the small chap came to school this very term.

BRITISH

Old Foes in New Places.

THE rat is a great danger to the airship and the aeroplane; the mechanism is so delicate that one rat on board can do serious mischief. If it bites through woodwork, or tears the fabric of the wings, it may cause the vessel to collapse.

There is a remarkable story of a large aeroplane that during the war was flying over mountainous country on the Western front. Pilot and observer were much disturbed at discovering traces of a rat on board, but they had no means of capturing it. They thought of landing, but they knew that their hidden foe might bring them to disaster before they could reach the earth. Suddenly a bright idea came to the pilot, and he began to mount higher and higher in the already rarefied air. Still higher he went until he had almost reached an altitude higher than any that man has attained. Both men found breathing extremely difficult; their ears felt as if bursting, their breath came in tearing gasps; but they were waiting for something they knew must happen. They knew that their enemy must succumb before they succumbed themselves. Presently, with a feeble scamper, a large rat emerged from some secret nook of the aeroplane and fell panting and dying on the floor. It was the work of a moment to fling it overboard.

An Alphabetical Retort.

AFTER several complaints had been made to him, the vicar of a certain church came to the conclusion that his old sexton was neglecting certain duties.

The sexton, who was not wanting in wit, strenuously denied the charge, and said that he was "not goin' to stand no meddlin' with his affairs."

"But, John," argued the vicar, "it behooves everybody to mind his 'p's' and 'q's.'"

"Everybody except me," retorted the old man, refusing to be cornered. "I've enough to do to mind my keys and pews."

The Cabman Detective.

NO doubt you have heard of Sherlock Holmes, the great detective. He is a famous character about whom you read in stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Some years ago Sir Arthur arrived in Paris. He took a cab and drove to his hotel. When he paid his fare, the cabman said, "Thank you, Monsieur Conan Doyle."

"How did you know my name?" asked Sir Arthur.

"Quite simply," said the man. "I read in the papers you were coming from Nice. When I saw you I noticed that you were English, that your hair had been cut by a southern barber, and that you had traces of southern mud on your shoes."

Sir Arthur stared at the man in astonishment. "Are these the only signs by which you recognized me?" he asked.

"No," replied the cabby. "I saw your name on the label tied to your bag!"

Our Bible Story.

Hezekiah, the good King.

WHEN Hezekiah became King of Judah very great and very strong were the heathen kings who ruled in Assyria. It was no wonder that the people of Judah lived in terror of those heathen kings, and that they forgot sometimes that, though the Jews were such a small, weak nation, they had a great Defender, and that God would protect His people.

There had been many bad kings in Judah who had forgotten God and brought evil on the city of Jerusalem. But now a new king had come to the throne, and as the people shouted, "God save the king," they hoped he would be strong and courageous and keep them safe from their heathen enemies.

Hezekiah, the new king, was a young man, but he was wise and brave, and, best of all, he trusted God with all his heart. The kings before him had been afraid of the great armies of the Assyrians, and had, in their fear, paid money or tribute every year to the heathen king, which really made them vassals or servants. Hezekiah would not do this.

"We serve the Lord God," he said, "and not the kings of Assyria."

But did the people really serve God? The king looked at the beautiful Temple, God's house, and there were no priests there, no service going on. The doors were shut. There was dust and ruin everywhere. The golden lamps had gone out, and were hanging all tarnished and dim; there was no sweet scent of incense, no sacrifice to God.

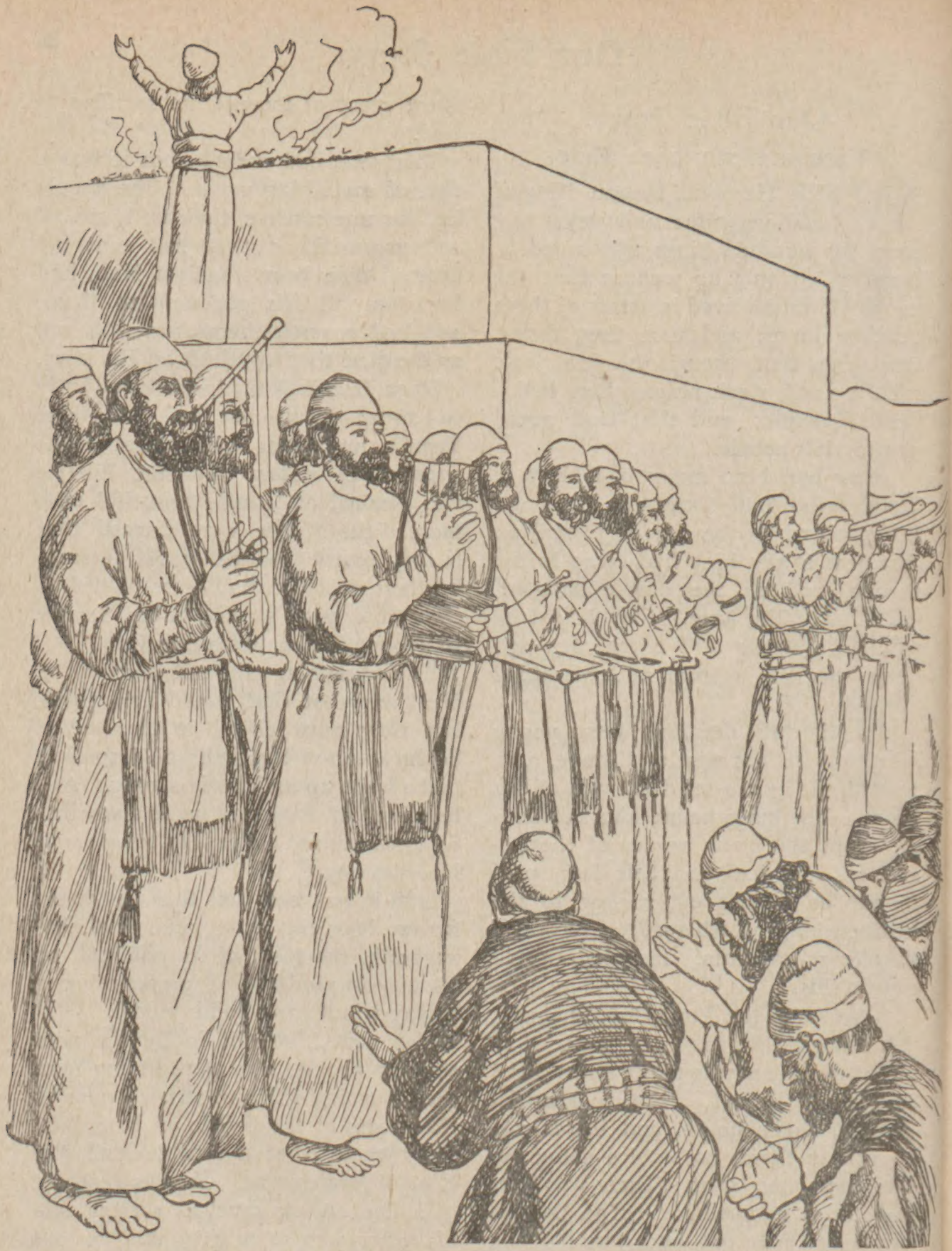
That was bad enough, but it was a sign of something worse. The people had become careless, their faith in God had grown dim; they had shut the door of their hearts against Him, had forgotten all His goodness to them, and had covered themselves with sin, as the dust that lay thick on His altar.

Then Hezekiah set to work suddenly to sweep away the evil from the Temple and from the hearts of the people. In a few days the Temple was cleaned and made beautiful once more; the people were warned that if they forgot God He would cease to be their defender, and were bidden to come to a great service in the Temple to ask for forgiveness and help.

The wise king did not stop there. He knew that God would help them, but they must also help themselves. So he ordered the walls of Jerusalem to be built up and made strong. And he stored up food, and made a wonderful underground channel to bring water into the city.

And it was well that this was done; for ere long the news came that Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, was on his way to punish the king for refusing to pay tribute and be his vassal.

The news, brought in by the poor country people, who were fleeing from their burning villages, struck terror to the hearts of the people of Jerusalem. They knew what a terrible man this King of Assyria was. He was as strong as a lion and as cruel as a tiger, and his army was so mighty that no one could stand against it. Far away on



HEZEKIAH REOPENS THE TEMPLE.

the horizon they could see the smoke of the burning villages, rolling nearer and nearer as the conquering army swept on. Who was to help them now? Even King Hezekiah's courage failed him for a while. He tried to make peace by promising to give all his gold and all the treasures of the Temple to Sennacherib. He sent secretly to ask the mighty Egyptians to help him. But it was all of no use. The whole country of Judah was laid waste, and still the army marched on to destroy Jerusalem. It was but a little thing for such a powerful army to do. They would sweep it away as easily as a child sweeps a fly off the wall.

Sennacherib laughed at the very idea that Hezekiah would dare to stand up and fight against him.

"I have shut him up as a bird in a cage, in his royal city of Jerusalem," he wrote boastfully.

All day long the people in Jerusalem watched with terrified eyes for the great armies that were marching, marching onwards. The sound of their feet was like thunder from the hills, the sheen of their spears like blinding lightning.

But it was then that Hezekiah's courage returned. In the time of greatest danger he remembered God's promise. The people were crouching in fear, but the king's voice sounded out clear and strong above their cries of terror and the weeping of the women.

"Be strong and courageous," he cried; "be not afraid nor dismayed for the King of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that are with him: for there is more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles."

Those brave words cheered the people. But all the night long they watched from the walls; perhaps the great army was resting: the attack would come in the morning.

The morning dawned, and the watchers still looked out with straining eyes. But as the light grew stronger they saw that something strange had happened. There was no attack. God had indeed fought their battle. The Angel of Death had passed over the camp, and the dead lay there in thousands. God's angels had stood between them and the enemy and had saved them, as God's angels can always do. Hezekiah had done well to bid them put their trust in the Lord their God.

"The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

"Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen;
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

"For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed on the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever were still!

"And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

"And there lay the rider, distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail;
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

"And the widows of Asshur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord."

Ostriches.

NEXT time that you happen to be travelling at top speed in an express train, *that* is the time to think about ostriches.

Why? Well, because, though it's difficult to believe, these huge birds can race along the sand of the desert at a rate of sixty miles an hour when they're running their hardest; at the speed, that is, of the quickest-going express train in the land.

It is to make up, partly, for the fact that they can't fly. No ostrich can fly. I expect they could, generations and generations ago, but by degrees they used their legs more and more, and their wings less and less, until their wings grew weaker and smaller, and their legs grew stronger and bigger; and nowadays the descendants of the first ostriches of all *can't* fly, even if they want to—their wings couldn't possibly bear their weight.

But the ostrich of nowadays *uses* his wings for all that: they act like sails as he gallops madly along; he keeps them stretched out, and "paddles" through the air with them. If it wasn't for their help, he couldn't turn and twist round suddenly as he does in his headlong race.

Where *does* the ostrich race? Well, its home is in Africa—and in Arabia too; and there *was* a time when the huge birds were found in India. It loves to live in sandy places, and likes best to travel about in groups. Five or six ostriches go about together generally, and very likely a giraffe or two will be with them—or some zebras, perhaps, or a herd of deer; for ostriches are sociable enough with other beasts, and they like a friendly party.

But they are not at all keen on being friendly and neighbourly with man; and there is good reason for it. They have been hunted and trapped in all sorts of ways for generations. In the East, the Arabs have a saying that "Allah gave fortune to the ostrich by touching its wings with his lips." This is because the fortune of the ostrich lies in the beautiful, glorious, waving, curling feathers that grow from his wings. Royalties wore the feathers; great rulers wore them; they were a sign of dignity and riches, and soon everybody wanted them; so the birds were hunted, run down, slaughtered, and trapped for the fortune that the gods had left them—the young birds often sharing the fate of their parents, though the poor babies had no feathers to lose. And so the feathers grew scarcer and scarcer, of course, as the birds began to die out. At last os-

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triches began to become really far to seek, and then the Government of Cape Colony woke up to the fact.

After that a plan was made which has answered very well. Ostrich farms were arranged in which the beautiful, great birds could live happily enough, being well cared for, in much the same way that they would have chosen for themselves if they had been free. Here they could make nests for their eggs, too, hatch their young ones and bring them up, all the while being themselves under the care of men whose business it was to look after them well, and every eight months to clip their wings of the beautiful feathers, which are sent to markets all over the world for sale.

This plan has worked very well. The birds are happy, far happier than their grand-parents can have been, who were hunted so cruelly, shot or slaughtered for their feathers. *Now* these tips are very easily and painlessly removed on the farms by the farmers, who have found that the best way to secure a satisfactory supply is to clip the feathers instead of roughly tearing them from the skin, which used to be the custom in the years gone by.

I suppose the great event in the ostrich's life is the nesting season, and out in the desert the ostrich chicks are well looked after by their fathers and mothers. The nests are just big hollows scooped out in the sand, and if you were to see the nest when it was full of eggs—well, it would fairly take your breath away for largeness. For each ostrich egg weighs three pounds, you know, which is about the same as the weight of two dozen hens' eggs; and in one single nest you may sometimes see as many as thirty eggs.

That is because three or four ostrich hens lay their eggs in the same nest together. They are queer kinds of mothers, for they seem to think that after the eggs are laid they need not trouble very much more about sitting on them. Certainly they arrange the sand all round the eggs in a kind of ridge, so that they shall be shielded from the fierce heat of the African sun; but after having done that—well, the *father* bird seems to have to sit on the eggs all through every night. Some writers say that in the daytime the mothers take on the job in shifts; yet they don't much want to do it, I fear, for father ostriches have been seen to *kick* the hens across the desert to the scene where duty really ought to have called them without any kicks at all. Very often, too, some lazy mother, after she has been settled for a few hours, seems to decide suddenly to go off for a holiday. She covers the eggs with sand to keep them from being addled by the sun's heat, and away she strides to stretch her legs. "Well, after all," she probably thinks, "it takes forty-two days to hatch out these great eggs, so—!" she is out of sight by the time she has finished half her sentence, going hot-foot across the sand at sixty miles an hour. The chances are, however, when she gets back again, that the eggs may all be gone.

For ostrich eggs are a find to even so many wild folk; jackals lie in wait, just in hopes that the mother may take

a walk. If she does—well, they hurry to the nest, smooth back the sand, roll several of the eggs together like croquet-balls, and grin when they hear them smash; then they lick up the delicious yolks and disappear. A vulture, too, hovering overhead, may catch a glimpse of an uncovered egg while the mother is away. He flies down and picks up a huge stone in his strong beak, and soars up again and drops the stone on the great white egg; then again down he flies to eat up the fruit of his steady aim.

But more clever perhaps than the vultures or jackals are the natives when they find an unprotected ostrich nest. "She'll be coming back," they grin, and they burrow under the sand quite close to the eggs. Back comes the mother, feeling remarkably chirpy after her express-speed canter, only to receive a poisoned arrow from the bow of the hidden native just as soon as she is settled on her nest again. And then!—well, as soon as the great bird lies dead, the native dresses up in her skin, arranges it so that he is quite covered over with the feathers—often paints his legs white as well—and the camouflage being complete, off he goes to "feed" with a herd of ostriches not far off, keeping to leeward of the wind all the time. He is tremendously clever, of course, in the way he copies their doings. He "takes in" all of the birds, who will at last cluster round him in the friendliest way; then, with his hidden bow and arrow, he soon polishes off quite a number of the group in turn.

But sometimes when a native finds a nest, he is not inclined to go ostrich hunting; he is just very hungry indeed, and in good fettle for a jolly meal. If this be the case, he takes a long stick and rakes out an egg or two from the nest. The birds will not suspect that he has been there, if he does not leave the smell of his hands behind him, and he can come back next day for another fresh egg, for probably more of them will have been laid by then. These huge eggs are much enjoyed by the natives, who cook them in the weirdest way. The egg is stood straight up amongst the embers of the fire. A hole is made in the top of it, and the inside is stirred continually with a bundle of sticks while it cooks. The result tastes like an omelette, and there is enough meat in a single egg, so I have heard, to satisfy ten hungry men.

But when the egg is eaten, the shell remains; and very useful the shells are to the natives. They use them as water-vessels, as plates, dishes, and drinking-cups; and often a store of water is laid underground in the desert in a collection of ostrich eggs laid at equal distances along the route.

A story is told of how a native robber made use of ostrich shells on one occasion. He had set his heart on possessing a herd of cattle which were feeding on the threshold of the desert, so he laid his plans accordingly. He collected ostrich shells, and filled them with water, then he went on a journey into the heart of the desert, burying the shells at intervals all the way. After this, he returned to the feeding-place of the cattle he coveted, and drove

them off into the desert. The owners could not follow him until they had laid in a store of water that would last them through the chase, so while they were hurrying through this necessary job, the thief gained time, and, *his* store being already waiting for him at intervals along the track that he had planned, he was able to head off his spoils to a far-off village, and thus get away.

Another ostrich story is a very different one. Down in Portsmouth an old lady heard that away at the docks was a whole cargo of live ostriches which had just come in from sea. "I'll go and see the poor things," quoth she, and locking up her house, she hastened off. Sad and pathetic the poor ostriches looked indeed, packed close together, and the worthy woman felt moved to tears. "Poor homeless creatures!" she whispered, and dropped a tear on to the head of the nearest of them. Quick as thought, out stretched the long neck, and the stranger had seized and swallowed her latch-key, which was hanging from her capable thumb by a bit of string. There was another poor homeless creature *then!*

The appetite of the ostrich is really most peculiar. His proper food is, of course, chiefly grass, and he eats leaves, seeds, fruits, and grains; but he seems to have a need for something hard, gritty, or sharp to help him to digest. Baby chicks are said to eat nothing but pebbles and egg-shells for the first few days of their life, and their fathers and mothers keep up the strange habit of swallowing stones, bits of rock, and all kinds of substances; indeed stones are sometimes found inside their eggs.

In captivity the ostrich's appetite is really a joke. He will, with an inquiring look, suddenly seize the chain from the coat of one visitor, a letter out of the hand of another, and will swallow any amount of coins that you may feel inclined to spare—or a brooch or two, if you have grown tired of them.

One ostrich, who had been suffocated in a zoo at Rome by stretching his head too far through the railings, and died in consequence, was found to contain the following treasure hoard: countless stones, seven nails, a scarf-pin, an envelope, thirteen copper coins, fourteen beads, two keys, a handkerchief, a silver medal of the Pope, and a small crucifix. His stomach was exactly like an old rag-and-bone shop. The only instance that I've ever heard of an ostrich dying of indigestion, however, was in the case of the one who swallowed a parasol. Another one who watched the carpenter mending his cage at the zoo, and then ate up the tool-box and all its contents while the man was at dinner, got off scot-free, I believe.

Golden Text for the Month.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.—PSALM xlvi. 1.

Motto for January.

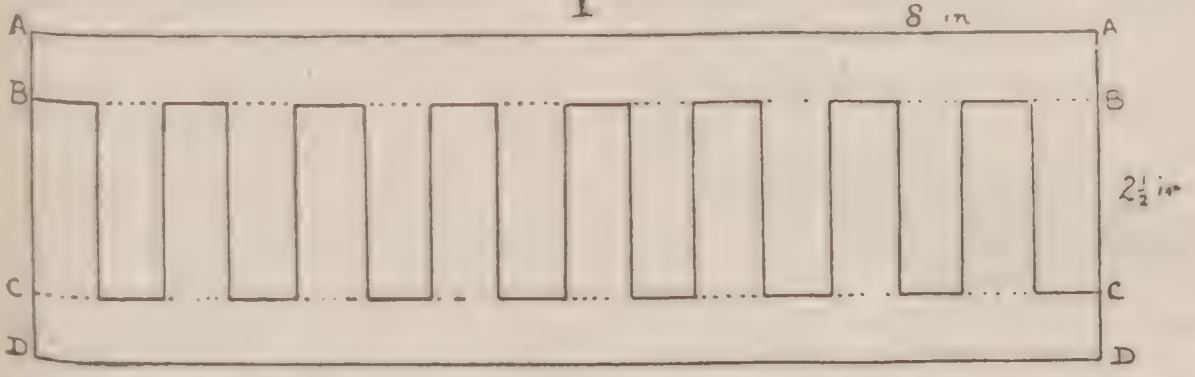
Be noble! and the nobleness that lies in other men, sleeping, but never dead, will rise in majesty to meet thine own.

LOWELL.

The Cardboard Chain.

CAN you cut this chain out of a piece of cardboard without any join whatever? Every link is solid, without its having been split and afterwards joined at any place. This is how it is done. Take a piece of cardboard measuring, say, 8 inches by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches, though the dimensions are of no real importance. If you want a long chain you must, of course, take a long strip of cardboard. First rule pencil lines BB and CC, half an inch from the edges, and also the short perpendicular lines half an inch apart. Rule lines on the other side of the cardboard in just the same way, and in order that they shall coincide it is well to prick through the card with a needle the points where the short lines end. Now take your penknife and split the card from AA down to BB, and from DD up to CC. Then cut right through the card along all the short perpendicular lines, and *half* through the card along the short portions of BB and CC that are not dotted. Now turn the card over and cut half through along the short lines on BB and CC at the places that are immediately beneath the dotted lines on the upper side. With a little careful separation of the parts with the penknife, the cardboard may now be divided into two interlacing ladder-like portions, as shown in Fig. 2; and if you cut away all the shaded parts you will get the chain, cut solidly out of the cardboard without any join, as shown above.

1



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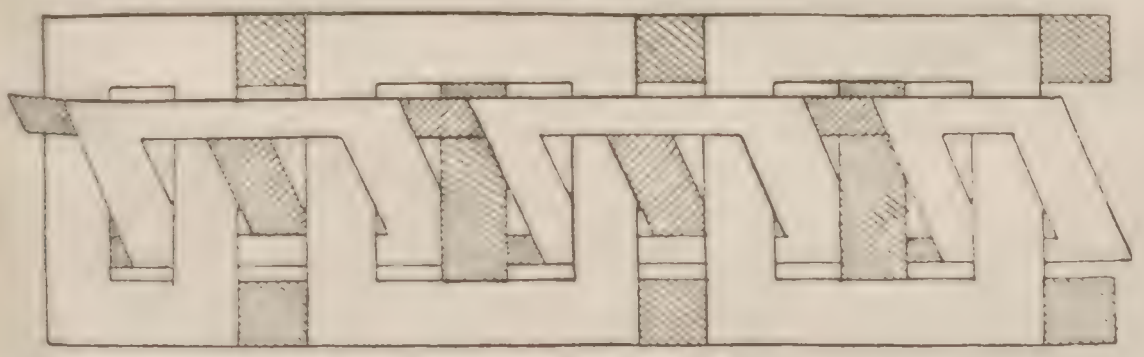


THE SERIAL STORY.

The Slap-Bang Boys.

By Angela Brazil.

CHAPTER I.

THE THREE B'S.

IT was certainly hard luck on Connie to be left for the Easter holidays in charge of Bob, Bert, and Billy. She objected hotly and strongly.

"If you've got to go away and nurse Grannie," she protested to mother, "leave these awful boys at a crèche, or a home for lost dogs, or a reformatory, or a zoo, or some place where they'd be decently restrained, or else petition the Government to let Daddy come home on special leave to look after them. *I* don't feel equal to the job."

"I'm sure you'll manage very nicely," murmured mother consolingly. "I've had a talk with them, and they've all promised——"

"Promised!" broke out the injured Connie. "I know their precious promises! Smashed five minutes after they're made! And I was going to have such a lovely time with Muriel these holidays! Painting will be all off now, and I shall be turned into a sort of lunatic asylum keeper. What a life it will be! Poor little me!"

"Cheero!" chuckled Bob. "You know we're three cherubs. We're all sprouting wings!"

"Sprouting horns more likely, you imps!" growled Connie. "I do think if Grannie wanted to be ill she might have chosen some other time than the holidays, or Aunt Belle might have gone and nursed her. It's too sickening to send for mother just now. I'll be a haggard, wizened, worn-out old woman at the end of a fortnight. They'll have to pack me off to a sanatorium for a rest cure. Nerve shock won't be the word for it!"

"Don't you worry about us, and we won't worry you," burbled Bert. "Get on with your painting, old sport! Bless you, *we* don't want to interrupt you! You can shut yourself up in your studio and not know where we are."

In the opinion of the boys it was rather a stunt to be left for the holidays with only Connie in charge. It is generally possible to circumvent a young elder sister, and they could almost always get on the right side of Maude, the parlourmaid. To be sure, there was Hilda, the cook, an arch enemy in the household; but even Hilda might be successfully dealt with. On the whole, they promised themselves a highly interesting and diverting three weeks.

Bob, who was ten, bristled with certain patriotic projects which he hoped to bring to fruition. Bert, a mechanical genius of eight, hankered to experiment with Daddy's tools in the attic; and seven-year-old Billy had decided to construct a dug-out in the garden. They celebrated the commencement of the holidays by a pillow-fight at 6.30 a.m.—the Allies *versus* Germany. It was Bert's turn to represent the Fatherland (they took

the unpopular part strictly in turns), but he was still in a dormouse condition; so Bob and Billy hauled him mercilessly out of bed, and with a pillow at his nose offered him his choice between fighting and smothering.

"No slackers here!" said Bob firmly. "You represent your country, or we'll finish you!"

"Mayn't I be interned for once?" pleaded the sleepy voice.

"Couldn't do it. It's against regulations. We give you your fighting chance, and you may thank your stars for it. Billy, dip that sponge in the water jug."

"There's no need. I'm wide awake!" objected the luckless Hun, seizing his pillow and hurling it at Billy's head by way of beginning the combat.

Billy ducked, and the pillow caught the tooth mug, which fell on the floor with a resounding smash, bringing in Hilda, who, as ill-luck would have it, was passing the door on her way downstairs. Her eloquence was brief but pointed. She collected the pillows and bolsters from the three beds and tucked them under her arm.

"You may just do without them," she remarked pithily. "They're meant for sleeping on, not for flinging about the room and breaking the china. You won't get another tooth mug till your mother comes back."

"Then our teeth must go without brushing," said Bob cheerfully. "By-the-bye, you're going to give us fried ham for breakfast, aren't you?"

"You deserve bread-and-water," growled Hilda. "A more impudent boy I never came across in all my born days!"

Connie sailed downstairs that morning a little late, and took her mother's place behind the tray. She was ultra-maternally particular about such details as elbows on the table, gulping of coffee, or clattering of knives and forks.

"You might have sat up all night studying an etiquette book!" protested Bob wrathfully.

"I'm determined you'll grow up with nice manners. You don't see Daddy sticking bread pills into the salt."

"No; he reads the paper and lights his pipe. Come on, Con, and be sporty! I want some jam. Oh, good old girl, you're a chubby one!"

"Bags me strawberry!" gurgled Billy ecstatically.

Connie on the whole had a soft heart. She ladled forth jam with a generous spoon. Moreover it occurred to her, when the meal was over, that perhaps it was not really her bounden duty to mount sentry the whole day over her brothers. For the moment they were employed rationally enough in arranging their cigarette card collections. She slipped thankfully upstairs to the artistic attic she called her studio, and was soon absorbed in the intricacies of stencil painting. Once her back was turned the boys hastily put the cigarette cards away. Five minutes later they were missing from the house, and were tearing at topmost speed along the road that led towards the moor.

CHAPTER II.

THE BRIGADE.

BOB carried a spade, Bert the coal hammer and the shovel, and Billy clasped half a loaf and three apple pasties, looted from the larder while Hilda was making the beds. The two younger boys were mutinous and indignant, but Bob's superior will power had carried the day.

"You're called up, I tell you!" he declared. "D'you want to be conscientious objectors? Then stop that grousing!—Dad's tools? You can have 'em next wet day, you young blighter! —Billy, you blithering idiot, you'll get your dug-out if you'll only wait a bit. Follow your superior officer, and we'll have a tophole time. When we're out of sight of the house I'll explain."

Directly they were round the corner and under cover of the cliff Bob unfolded his project. "We're a brigade, you see. Not exactly scouts, or special constables, or secret service, or national defence, but a kind of combination of 'em all. Fact is the milk-boy told me last night that lights have been seen flashing up on the moor near Gibbet Copse. Nobody knows where they come from; but of course it means German spies somewhere. I asked him if any one was on the job to find out, and he said he didn't think so; they were all so busy at the farm, being short-handed owing to the war. Now d'you twig? We're going to find out ourselves. This country's got to be looked after. If the Government's slack the people must do it, and 'the people' means you and me—at least that's what old Cobbles says at school."

"H'm! Rather a blossomy idea!" approved Bert. "How're you going to set to work?"

"We are going to camp in the wood and poke about and see what we can find out. We'll establish a base first, and then gradually make outposts."

"Can we have a dug-out?" chortled Billy.

"That's what we've brought the spade and shovel for. Look here, young 'un, don't smash those tarts! Here, stick 'em in my pocket! That's the commissariat department! Would you like to carry the spade?"

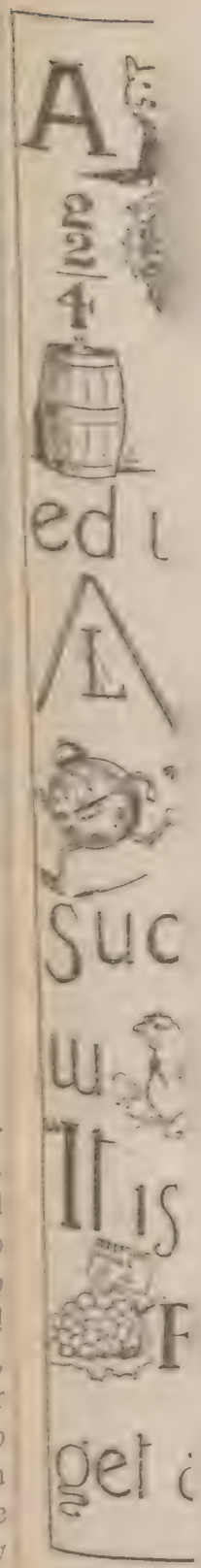
Billy relinquished the pasties, and shouldered the spade cheerfully. Bert's expression had changed from bored acquiescence to patriotic enjoyment. He assumed a military stride, and marched along singing:—

"Slap-bang! here we are again!
Here we are again!
Here we are again!
Slap-bang! here we are again!
Three jolly dogs are we!"

"We want a name for the company," he remarked, stopping suddenly.

"You've just christened it! We'll be the Slap-Bang Boys. There's no nonsense about us. We're out to do business, and no mistake. Look here! We've got to take a vow.—Come here, Billy!—Now both of you say it after me: 'I hereby solemnly promise to serve my country and strafe all German spies, and if I break this oath may I be torn by barbed wire and bombed by zepps now and for evermore!'"

(*To be continued.*)



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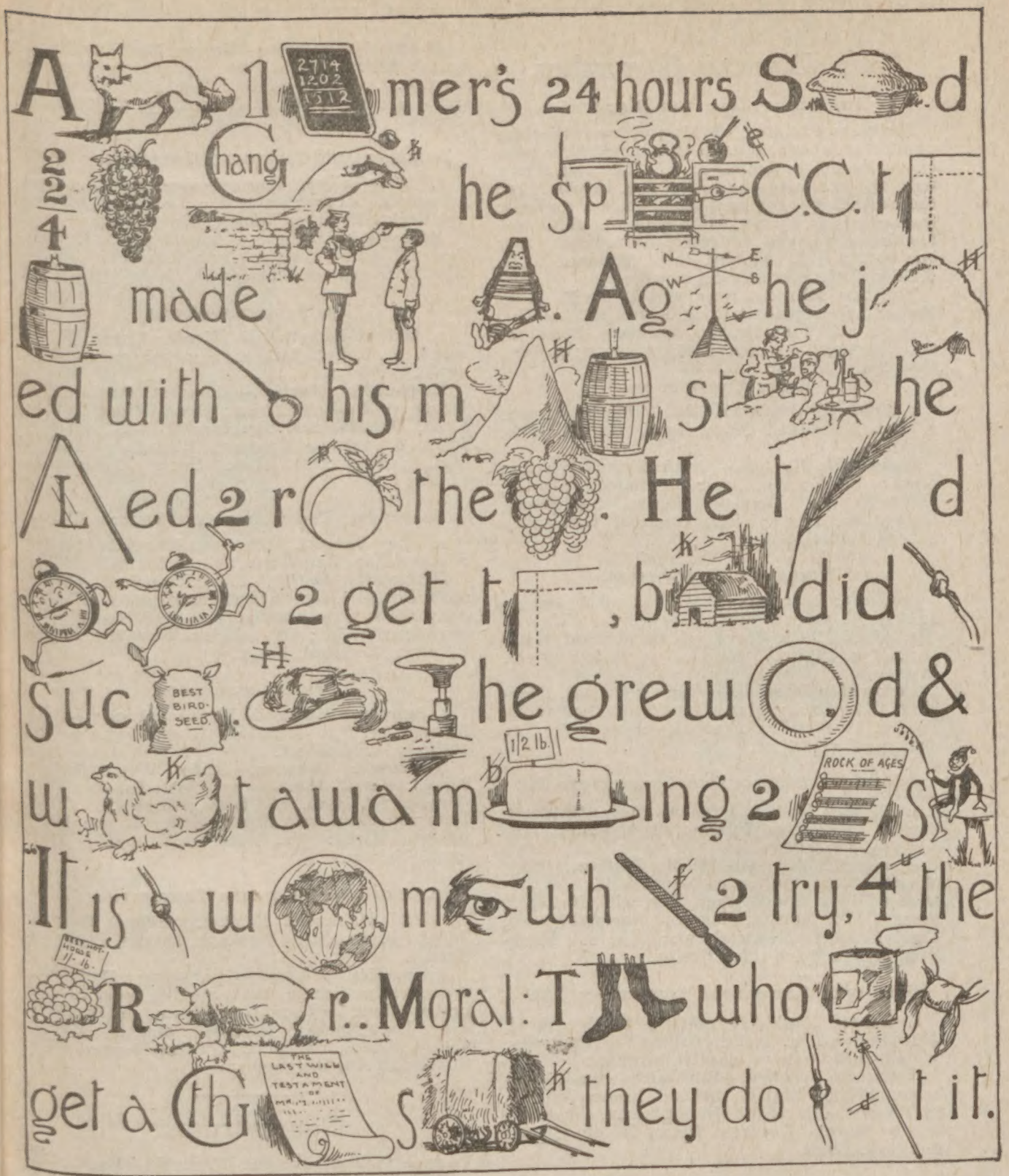

A FABLE PUZZLE.

This is one of Æsop's Fables. Try to write it out. The solution will be given next month.

Prize List for November.

THE TRAMPS AND THE BISCUITS.

The correct solution of this problem is that the smallest number of biscuits there could have been originally in the box is 1,021. The first tramp took 255 and gave one to the dog, leaving 765; the second ate 191 and gave one to the dog, leaving 573 in the tin. Similarly, the third and fourth had 143 and 107 respectively, both giving one to the dog. Finally, there remained to be divided in the morning 321 biscuits.

The best solutions were sent in by R. F. P. Manise, 112 Lavenham Road, Southfield, London, S.W.18, and John Semple, Galloney, Strabane, Co. Tyrone, to whom book prizes have been awarded.

ESSAY COMPETITION.

1. Freda M. Combe, Hollist, Midhurst, Sussex. 2. Bob Nicholson, Moydalagan, Dromara, Co. Down.

Honourable Mention.—Gracie Helena Wheeler, Upper Easebourne, near Midhurst, Sussex; Hilda Woor, St. Dominic's School, High Street, Harpenden, Herts; Bert Overton, Kemberton School, Shifnal, Salop.

BEHEADING COMPETITION.

Answers: Boar, lark, skate, fox, pink, orange or bramble, mouse, finch, rasp, bear.

1. Wilfrid D. D. Fenton, 29 Braid Road, Edinburgh. 2. Violet I. Hughes, 33 Friar's Street, Inverness.

Honourable Mention.—Allan Stevenson, Glenview, Chapelhall; Mary Gumbleton, Huntcliffe, Bexley, Kent; Ivy Furlong, Brynamlwg, The Avenue, Carmarthen.

DRAWING AND COLOURING COMPETITION (A).

1. E. May Dallyn, Pitsham Farm, Midhurst, Sussex. 2. Nancy Furlong, Brynamlwg, The Avenue, Carmarthen.

Honourable Mention.—Cecilia Pattison, Green Mount, Bollington, near Macclesfield; Arthur Dennis Drury, The Cottage, Star Stile, Halstead, Essex; Elsie Dutton, Church of England School, Minshull Vernon, near Crewe; Mazoura Flockhart, 81 Brunstane Road, Joppa.

SCRIPTURE KNOWLEDGE COMPETITION (A).

1. Donald Gould, Gartsherrie, Shirley Road, Southampton. 2. Nellie Daniels, Stoneybridge School, Belbroughton, near Stourbridge.

Honourable Mention.—Edwin Hammond, Kemberton School, Shifnal, Salop; Robina Wilson, 164 Auchenairn Road, Bishopbriggs, Glasgow; George Brown, Doesgate Farm, Bulphan, near Romford, Essex.

COMPOSITION COMPETITION.

1. Nora Williams, Stoneybridge School, Belbroughton, near Stourbridge. 2. Dorothy Cooper, Mount School, Kersal, Manchester.

Honourable Mention.—George Bennett, Kemberton School, Shifnal, Salop; Decima Rawlinson, St. Dominic's School, High Street, Harpenden, Herts; Barbara Wright, 36 Caledonian Crescent, Edinburgh.

DRAWING AND COLOURING COMPETITION (B).

1. Amy Giles, Stoneybridge School, Belbroughton, near Stourbridge. 2. Fred Driver, 134 Cock Hill Lane, Rubery, Birmingham.

Honourable Mention.—Anne Clay, Kemberton School, Shifnal, Salop; Beth Robinson, Mount School, Kersal, Manchester.

TRANSFORMED WORDS.

1. Melvin Forsyth, 26 Ellerslie Street, Johnstone. 2. Robert Jackson, Knocknagoney, Holywood, Co. Down.

Honourable Mention.—Margaret Cardno, 12 Urquhart Road, Aberdeen; Irene Dellar, Church Lane, Dunton, near Brentwood, Essex; Leslie Hart, 8 Preshaw Crescent, Mitcham; Gladys Hill, 3 Rosemount Road, South Hampstead, N.W.3.

SCRIPTURE KNOWLEDGE COMPETITION (B).

1. Lucy Bennett, Tillington, Petworth, Sussex. 2. Anne Clay, Kemberton School, Shifnal, Salop.

Honourable Mention.—Mary Rawson, St. Dominic's School, High Street, Harpenden, Herts; Amy Giles, Stoneybridge School, Belbroughton, near Stourbridge; Olive Brown, Doesgate Farm, Bulphan, Romford, Essex.

LETTER COMPETITION.

1. Margaret MacLeod, Mount School, Kersal, Manchester. 2. Bernard Gibbs, New Road, Rubery, Birmingham.

Honourable Mention.—Ruth Wye, Mount School, Kersal, Manchester; John Rundle, Trethewell, St. Eval, St. Issey, Cornwall; Doris Ross, St. Dominic's School, High Street, Harpenden, Herts; Jim Bennett, Tillington, Petworth, Sussex.

DRAWING AND COLOURING COMPETITION (C).

1. Marie Hammond, Kemberton School, Shifnal, Salop. 2. Zoe Ethel Stericker, Mayles, Cobham, Surrey.

Honourable Mention.—Humphrey Hadgkiss, Stoneybridge School, Belbroughton, near Stourbridge; Jack Pattison, Green Mount, Bollington, near Macclesfield; Margaret Beattie, Mount School, Kersal, Manchester; Frank Depper, New Road, Rubery, Birmingham.

Conundrums.

WHY is twilight like the letter Y?—Because it is the close of day.

What letter of the alphabet will change a white rose bush into a pink one?—The letter L, because it will make it blush.

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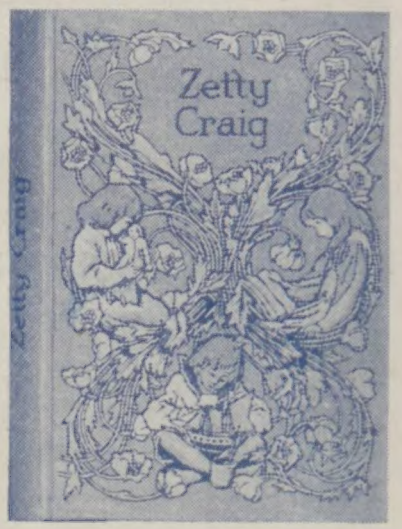

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